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ABSTRACT

Grade point averages of students transferring from community colleges were compared with those of the native students in a professional education program. Questionnaires concerning socioeconomic backgroups were also analyzed. A significant difference of grade point average existed in favor of native students for the first year. Mean grade point averages rose for both groups in the second semester, the native group's to a greater degree. Differences in socioeconomic status between the two groups did not appear significant, nor were there great differences in the goals of the two groups. (RS)

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THE ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND SOCIAL MOBILITY OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER AND NATIVE STUDENTS IN A PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION

This study was concerned with comparing the grade point averages of community college transfer students with those of the native students in a professional education program. The researcher also attempted to identify the difference which might exist between the two groups in terms of socioeconomic status, incidence of intergenerational social mobility, and future professional goals.

Hypotheses

Basic to this study were the following hypotheses:

1. A significant difference of academic achievement as measured by grade point average exists between native and tranfer students during their first year of upper division studies within the College of Education of Glassboro State College.

2. Transfer students from New Jersey County Colleges represent a lower level of socioeconomic status than do native students within the College of Education of Glassboro State College.

3. A greater incidence of upward social mobility exists within the transfer group than within the native group.

4. A positive relationship does exist between socioeconomic status and academic achievement.

Description of the Subjects

The two groups studied consisted entirely of members of the Class of 1971 who were matriculated in the College of Education at Glassboro State College during the 1969-1970 academic year. A total of 736 questionnaires were returned to the researcher, which represented 71.3 percent of the education majors of that class. Completed questionnaires were returned by ninety-two community college transfer students and 569 native students.

Data Gathering Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to the students of the Class of 1971 through the cooperation of professors representing seventeen departments. The questionnaire was administered during the Spring Semester of the 1969-1970 academic year. A total of 569 native and ninety-two transfer students responded to the instrument. Fourteen questionnaires were returned incomplete, and an additional sixty-one instruments were returned by students who had transferred from either another four-year college or the Division of Continuing Education of Glassboro State College. These were discarded prior to the analysis of the data.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. Sections I, II, and IV were comprised of items developed by the researcher. Section III, entitled Family Background, consisted of four items which together comprises the Family Social Status (FS) scale which is published by Educational Testing Service. Raw scores on the scale range from six through fifty-four, with high scores indicating high status.

The grade point averages of eight hundred native and 114 transfer education majors were made available through the computer services of the Division of Educational Services of Glassboro State College.

Analysis of Data

The grade point averages of the native and transfer students for the 1969-1970 academic year were compared through the application of the formula for the analysis of variance of groups of unequal size. The scores of socioeconomic status of the native and transfer students were compared through the application of the same formula.

Since the native and transfer students had attained the same level of education, the educational levels of the fathers of both groups were compared by computing the t-test for comparison of the mean scores. This comparison enabled the researcher to determine if the attainment of upper division status promoted the upward social mobility of either of the student groups to a greater degree.

The correlation coefficient using coded scores was computed to determine the relationship which existed between academic achievement and socioeconomic status.

FINDINGS

Related to Academic Achievement

The grade point averages which were attained by the native and transfer students during their first year of professional studies were identified and compared. An analysis of the variance of the grade point averages of the two groups indicated that a significant difference of grade point average existed in favor of the native students for the

first year of upper division professional studies.

The literature has not only been concerned with native and transfer student achievement during their first year of professional studies, but has also been concerned with the pattern of transfer student achievement in upper division studies. Due to the discrepancies in the literature, the researcher was prompted to determine the pattern of transfer student success in the College of Education of Glassboro State College. The Fall Semester grade point averages of the native and transfer students were compared through the application of the formula for analysis of variance. These grade point averages represented the achievement of the students for their first semester of upper division studies. The mean grade point average of the native students for that semester was 2.63, with the transfer students earning a mean average of 2.58. The obtained value of F did not equal or surpass the tabled value of F at the .05 level of confidence.

Since a significant difference of grade point average existed between the groups for the first year of upper division studies, and not for the first semester, it was decided to compare the grade point averages of the native and transfer students for the Spring Semester of 1970. The mean grade point average of the native sample for this semester was 3.20. The mean grade point average of the transfer sample for the same semester was 3.04. The mean grade point averages for both groups had increased during their second semester of upper division study, the native to a greater degree. The variances of the grade point averages of both groups were analyzed, and the results indicated that a significant difference of academic achievement did exist between the native and transfer students during their second semester of upper division study.

The achievement of the transfer and native students was similar during the Fall Semester of 1969. However, the achievement of the native students was significantly greater than that of the transfer students during the Spring Semester of 1970. The grade point average of the native group for the total 1969-1970 academic year was significantly greater than that of the transfer group.

Related to Socioeconomic Status

The scores of socioeconomic status of the native and community college transfer students were compared. A greater variability of socioeconomic status existed within the transfer group, but that variability was not significantly greater than the variability which existed within the native sample. When the scores of socioeconomic status of the two groups were compared, the analysis indicated that a significant difference of socioeconomic status did not exist between the community college transfer and native students as groups.

It was also indicated that the educational backgrounds of the fathers of both the native and transfer students were similar. When the educational level of the students was compared with that of the fathers, it was obvious that the attainment of upper division status had promoted the intergenerational social mobility of the students within both groups. Since the educational levels of the fathers of both the native and transfer students were similar, it was indicated that the transfer students were not experiencing a greater incidence of upward social mobility than were the native students.

The literature indicated that the social class membership of an individual has an effect upon the goals to which he aspires. Since the literature indicated that community college students frequently repre-

sent a lower level of social class, and since the sample transfer students were found to be of the same socioeconomic status as the native students, the researcher decided to determine whether or not the professional goals of transfer students are different from those of native students when significant differences of socioeconomic status do not exist between the groups. The questionnaire asked the students to indicate their professional goals immediately upon graduation, and five years after graduation. The review of those responses allowed the researcher to group the expressed professional goals into four categories. The chi square test was computed, and the value of chi square was not significant. The data indicated that the stated professional goals of the transfer students were not significantly different from those of native students when the groups were representative of the same socioeconomic status.

Since the professional goals of the transfer and native students were found to be similar, the researcher then decided to determine whether or not professional goals were associated with the socioeconomic status of the students. The levels of socioeconomic status which existed within the student sample were established by computing the quartiles of the scores of socioeconomic status. The goals of the students were identified, and the frequencies entered in the appropriate cells. The obtained chi square value was not significant. It could be inferred from the data that no relationship existed between level of socioeconomic status and the professional goals of education majors.

The data have indicated that a significant negative relationship exists between socioeconomic status and grade point average achievement within the College of Education of Glassboro State College.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this study, these following conclusions have been reached concerning those similarities and differences which exist between community college transfer and native education majors at Glassboro State College.

Related to Academic Achievement

Community college tranfer students achieved as well as native students when they were in direct competition for grades in traditional classroom situations during their first semester of professional upper division studies. Both the transfer and native education majors experienced a gain in academic achievement during their second semester of professional study. The gain experienced by the native students was greater than that of the transfer students. The grade point average achievement of the native students during the second semester was significantly greater than that of the transfer students. The greater second semester achievement of the native student was sufficient enough to create a significant difference of achievement between the two groups in terms of their achievement for the total first year of professional study.

Related to Socioeconomi Status

The community college transfer and native education majors were representative of the same population in terms of socioeconomic status. The variability of socioeconomic status which existed within the transfer population was only slightly greater than that of the native students. It may be concluded that the New Jersey community colleges included in this study have not provided access to upper division professional education studies to students of a lower social class than that typically represented by native education majors.

It is a fact that the state colleges of New Jersey have been forced to refuse admission to the majority of applicants. It is evident that students have found an alternate route for admission into the teaching profession, a profession which initially admits students representative of similar family backgrounds.

It was determined that the fathers of the native and transfer students were similar in terms of educational background. Intergenerational social mobility through higher education was experienced to the same degree by both the native and transfer students. The professional goals which were expressed by the native and transfer students were similar.

The professional goals of education majors were not directly associated with the type of institution in which they completed their lower division studies, nor were they directly associated with their level of socioeconomic status. Education majors have indicated that they are committed to the education profession regardless of socioeconomic status.

The social class membership of the education major seemed to

be negatively related to his academic success in upper division studies. The findings support the conclusion that the lower status student has tended to achieve at a higher level than the student of a higher socio-economic status.

IMPLICATIONS

Pertaining to Academic Achievement

The literature generally indicates that community college students tend to compete more successfully with native students as they advance through each semester of upper division study. A reverse pattern of transfer student achievement was found to exist at Glassboro State College. The transfer students at Glassboro State College competed successfully with the native students during their first semester of upper division study. Both the transfer and native students upgraded their level of achievement during the second semester of professional study. However, the achievement enjoyed by the native students was significantly greater than that of the transfer students during the Spring Semester.

Since the same students were involved in the analysis for both semesters, it would seem reasonable to assume that the differences of

achievement which existed during the Spring Semester were the result of a variable unique to that period of time. The second semester experience differed from the first semester experience in that the students participated in a professional laboratory experience during the Spring Semester of 1970. This professional laboratory experience was similar in many ways to the experience often referred to as student teaching. This experience required that the students function in an actual classroom situation under the supervision of both a classroom teacher and a college supervisor. This observation may be meaningful, especially when recognizing that Haberbosch found that native students of the School of Education at the University of Kansas surpassed junior college transfers on grades received in student teaching.[1]

It was found that the native students in the College of Education of Glassboro State College achieved better than the transfer students when they were in direct competition for grades during a semester in which they were required to participate in a professional laboratory experience.

While it was found that the transfer students achieved significantly lower than the native students during the second semester, it should be recognized that they did achieve at a level which may be considered to be above average. The transfer students were successful in upper division studies in spite of the fact that they were initially admitted to lower division studies through a system of "open door" ad-

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[1]John Ferguson Haberbosch, "A Comparison of the Academic Success of Native Students and Junior College Transfers Who Graduated From the School of Education, University of Kansas, 1956-1960," (Unpublished Ed.D. dissertation, University of Kansas, 1961), p. 68.

missions. The achievement of these transfer students prompts one to question whether or not varying lower division experiences affect the upper division success of students to an important degree.

A limitation of this study was that no attempt was made to control for differences of academic aptitude between the native and transfer students. It is possible that the system of higher education of New Jersey had already controlled for that variable. The higher social status students at Glassboro may not have met the academic requirements of the more prestigious institutions of the State. Students of a lower academic aptitude who were initially matriculated in a county college transfer program may have been counseled to transfer to another program, they may have been dismissed, or they may have withdrawn voluntarily. While the county colleges have encouraged students to take advantage of the opportunities which they offer, they may have also altered the goals of their less able transfer students. This implication is not in conflict with the opinion of Sewell and Shah who stated that the educational system "sorts people according to differences in valued abilities, channels them into streams of training which develop their capacities, and encourages them to aspire to adult roles that are in keeping with their talents."[2]

Since the Spring Semester grade point average most frequently assigned to the native students was a perfect 4.0, it may be inferred that the grades assigned during that semester discriminated to a minimal degree within the native population of education majors. The grades

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[2]William H. Sewell and Vimal P. Shah, "Socioeconomic Status, Intelligence, and the Attainment of Higher Education," Sociology of Education, 40:1, Winter, 1967.

assigned implied that the greater number of native education majors were able to function exceptionally well when they were placed in a professional laboratory experience.

Pertaining to Socioeconomic Status

Educators have claimed that the community college serves students of a lower social class. It has also been claimed that these two-year colleges offer opportunities to students who represent a broader spectrum of social class than that typically represented by students of four-year colleges. To summarize, the community college has been viewed as that institution which is structured to assist a wide range of persons in improving their status in society.

The county college transfer students who entered the College of Education of Glassboro State College were representative of the same socioeconomic status as that represented by those native students who entered Glassboro in September of 1967. It may be implied from these data that either the college of education and those community colleges serve students of the same social class or that those county colleges of New Jersey have not provided access to upper division professional studies to students of a lower social status. It is quite possible, due to the crowded condition in the state colleges, that the county colleges up until this time have been serving as extensions to those four-year institutions.

The literature has stated that people frequently view higher edu-

cation as a vehicle which supports upward social mobility. The statement has been made that it is easier for a student of a lower social status to move upward than it is for a student of a higher social background. Students from the upper social classes may be required to attend graduate school as a manifestation of upward social mobility. The data have indicated that students of a higher socioeconomic status do not tend to achieve as well in terms of grade point average as do students of the lower social status in the College of Education. The literature has indicated that students of a higher socioeconomic background tend to matriculate within either a public university or a private four-year college.[3] The high socioeconomic status students at Glassboro State College may not have been able to attend other types of colleges due to weaknesses in academic aptitude.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

1. An increasing number of students are entering professional education programs after completing lower division studies in a community college. The receiving colleges should continually evaluate the achievement of these students after transfer.

2. It is possible that professional laboratory experiences present more difficulty to transfer students than to native education majors. Research should be conducted to determine if any specific requirements are uniquely difficult for the transfer student.

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[3] K. Patricia Cross. The Junior College Student: A Research Description (Princeton, New Jersey: Educational Testing Service, 1968), p. 15.

3. The College of Education of Glassboro State College should consider the possibility of an alternate system of student evaluation in relation to professional laboratory experiences.

4. Recognizing the increased involvement of community colleges in the education of future teachers, colleges of education should maintain an official channel of communication with community college personnel. This structure could promote the establishment of a system of articulation which would be supportive in terms of transfer student achievement.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The findings and conclusions of this study have motivated the researcher to suggest that the following studies be initiated:

1. Researchers should compare the socioeconomic status of total community college student populations with those of other higher education populations. This would enable researchers to determine if, in fact, community colleges are providing educational opportunities to students who represent a lower level of socioeconomic status.

2. Based on the recognition that the achievement of community college transfer students may vary from institution to institution, the achievement of transfer and native students in professional education programs should be compared with the design of the research allowing for the control of academic aptitude.

3. The academic achievement of community college transfer students should be compared with the achievement of native students

in a professional education program for the total two year period of upper division study. An appropriate standardized instrument of achievement should be utilized

4. A follow-up study of teaching effectiveness should be initiated which compares the effectiveness of transfer students with that of native students immediately upon graduation.

5. Institutional research should attempt to determine whether or not transfer students achieve as well as native students in other specific professional programs.

6. An attempt should be made to determine whether or not students who are experiencing upward social mobility through higher education achieve to a higher degree than students who are not upwardly mobile.

7. Cooperative research projects should be initiated between two-year and four-year colleges in an attempt to identify those similarities and differences which exist between their students.